

The ABCs of Resort Travel With Kids

Finding the perfect recipe for a successful resort vacation with kids

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

Any parent who has attempted resort travel with children knows that it can often be a challenge, depending on where you go. For many, it seems that this desired mode of vacation is an impossible dream. It's no wonder, as so many resorts cater to adult-only needs with child-friendly amenities in limited supply. But this isn't always the case. When done right, a resort vacation with kids in tow can offer an experience suited to travelers of all ages.

Struggles of family travel

Natalie Preddie-Zamojic knows all about the struggles that parents encounter when attempting to travel with their kids. Though this travel writer and mom of two regularly vacations with her children, she has experienced firsthand the many challenges that accompany family travel. "I went to a luxury American destination that, although had family-friendly outings, was not super kid-friendly," she explains. "Trying to wrangle a toddler and ensure he didn't touch anything was tough. There was nothing he could eat either. The whole experience was a nightmare."

And Preddie-Zamojic is not alone in her frustration. A quick Google search using the term "nightmare travel with kids" will quickly pull up pages of complaints from weary parents who courageously tried to have an enjoyable vacation with their children, to no avail. Much of the problem is that many resorts aren't adequately set up to host kids. With paying adults being the main focus, parents with children are often ignored and options for easily bored children are few, if at all. The younger the child, the more attention they require, a fact not lost on most parents.

"With kids, your experiences will be different, your schedules are not your own and your activities include entertaining a little one. Managing expectations are key to enjoying a family vacation," says Preddie-Zamojic.

Resorts doing it right

Mark ODell, director of recreation at Deerhurst Resort (deerhurstresort.com) in Muskoka, Ontario, knows all about the challenges of family travel. As the "go-to" person at the resort, his mission is to facilitate a memorable vacation for all. He's particularly sensitive to the needs of parents traveling with kids and as a result, programming at Deerhurst includes a range of activities and amenities for all ages.

"We have something for everybody," he offers. "We provide adventures ranging from water skiing to forest trekking and everything in between. Parents can join their kids or do their own 'solo' adventures: visiting the on-site spa, going for a hike, golfing and more," he continues. Much of Deerhurst's appeal is its location in Muskoka, often seen to be one of the jewels of the Canadian landscape. Just two hours north of Toronto, Deerhurst offers parents the luxury of a resort retreat that caters to both their need for relaxation and fun, as well as the desire to offer their children a memorable vacation.

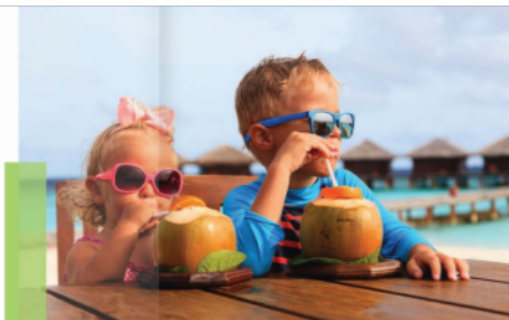
For parents in search of a resort escape that includes sun and sand, options do exist. Just ask Jeana McDermott, sales and marketing manager for Ocean Hotels, Barbados (oceanhotelsbarbados.com). When asked about key elements required for parents traveling with children, she cites dedicated spaces for vacationed kids, a swimming pool and different food choices as important factors.

Like ODell, McDermott understands the need for families to have choice in their vacation options. She adds that activities that families can do on and off property and some interesting excursions will also help make resort vacations with kids more enjoyable. As well, she reminds parents about the possibility of leaving the property as an option. "The ability to hire a car makes a great family day out," she says.

A family-focused approach

Like Deerhurst Resort, Ocean Hotels Barbados has created accommodations with families in mind. With the latter, the resort has two different areas: one quiet and geared to adults only, and one more family and activity-oriented. Deerhurst has a variety of rooms that cater to couples and families, and their three-bedroom condo suites are outfitted with a small kitchen, dining room, fireplace and ensuite bathroom—perfect for family and intergenerational vacations. Grandparents are often seen at the resort accompanying their grandkids to many of the daily activities on site.

"We really try to support that human connection between families. It's at the heart of all of our programs," says ODell. "Having a shared experience with your family and your loved ones is so important and we're happy to help make that happen."



FAMILY FOCUS RESORT TRAVEL WITH KIDS

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Do your research: Call ahead and go online before you visit any locale.

The devil is in the details: Look for resorts that offer family-friendly accommodations, including family suites, varied food choices, activities, child care and more.

Remember to treat yourself: Resorts that offer adult-only and kid-free zones or activities will allow you the rest and relaxation you deserve, just make sure your chosen property has childcare or kids programming included.